

Dear Js,

3/25/75

You may not have noticed the Sunday Post's story on the closing of Chez Francois (3/23/75). Reminds me of how important Francois may have been to me in the public appearances I have made.

He was a friend, had visited us at the farm from time to time, ate our produce personally and bought specialty items for the restaurant, like geese.

There came a time when I had it arranged through a friend to appear on my first talk show, then run by a Steve Allison in Washington. (He died in LA several years ago.) After it was arranged I was warned he was a people eater.

That particular appearance was for a Saturday night.

That particular day I had gotten an urgent phone call from a New American Library vice president Ed Kuhn, for a copy of Whitewash, not then out long. So, the only fast way to get it to him was via Washington. I was thus there hours before the show began. Naturally I wandered over to have a drink with Francois. (I intended doing no eating to be alert, the lean-and-hungry side.)

As we chatted Francois learned my purpose and was excited. Seems like he was a fan of Allison's. Confirmed that he was also a tough one.

It was a slow day in the resaturant so we were in his office. I'd sit and drink when he had to leave on business on the floor or in the kitchen. I also relaxed a bit, having been pretty thoroughly scared. I don't think I'd even listened to a talk show until then. The man who arranged it was then Brentano's Washington manager. (But they would not let him sell the book!)

I kept declining to eat and paying less and less attention to what was going on around me. This included a waitress napkinning Francois' desk. By the time he told me that he was just having a little something brought in for me because the show ran so late and a little, just a wee little, would tide me over without stuffing me, my resolve not to eat was gone. And I was rather mellow, if not drunk.

Had I not been I doubt I'd have eaten those snails. I've been hooked on them since.

Before it was over Francois had stuffed me and I was not protesting. I was also relaxed and instead of being drunk merely had a slight edge. It was exactly the right condition for my first talk show and with a man who without doubt was one of the toughest and least inhibited.

From then on I was never afraid of any show, any odds on them, any host, and I did all the roughest, with the worst kinds of gangups. I was also in the proper condition to learn from the initial experience, proper state of mind. Had my state of mind and well-being been otherwise I think the results could have been. Allison was what he was reputed to be but I was unintimidated and enough uninhibited to come out fine and for him to want me thereafter. In fact, later he backed off when I got angry over the show on The Scavengers.

I owe much to Francois, more than free meals and bottles of wine when I was there with others, etc. Once when I was there with Ramparts people I didn't even see Francois but there were these little courtesies that impressed the Rampartsers. I remember Welch and Penn Jones and I think Mark Stone, Issy's brother. And bottles of wine before we ordered them.

Had I had a different experience with Allison there might have been different results to the two very rough New York shows that I think broke the subject open, Long John Nebel's and the Kane/Holt, Rinehart loaded Alan Burke show.

Francois always had a country place in Virginia, unlike what the story suggests. I supplied him with my special ducks for it. He paid me back well and many times over.